



**U.S. Department of Justice  
U.S. Attorney's Office  
Western District of Texas**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**25 ARRESTED IN EL PASO SMUGGLING RINGS  
CHARGED WITH USING GATEWAY HOTEL TO HARBOR ILLEGAL ALIENS**

**John E. Murphy, Acting United States Attorney and United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement – Office of Special Investigations Special Agent in Charge Manuel Oyola-Torres** announced that 25 individuals, including the owner and two managers of the Gateway Hotel in El Paso, have been arrested over the past two weeks on charges of conspiracy to smuggle and harbor illegal aliens for financial gain.

This afternoon, United States Magistrate Judge Richard Mesa denied bond for Song U. Chon, owner of the Gateway Hotel, and earlier this morning, United States Magistrate Judge Norbert Garney denied bond to Guillermo Lopez-Nunez, an alleged alien smuggling organization leader.

Last week, alleged alien smuggling organization leader Maria Isidra Luna-Avila, Gateway Hotel night manager Alejandro Garcia-Rico and former hotel maintenance man Jose Herrera were all denied bond after being arrested by agents with the Border Enforcement Security Task Force (BEST), which is led by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Following their arrest last week, bond was set at \$20,000 for Gateway Hotel day manager Armando Arzate and Juo-Hsuan Hsu (Pronounced "Jo-Shwan-Soo"), owner of May's Café once located inside the Gateway Hotel.

On May 27, 2009, a federal grand jury in El Paso returned a 51-count indictment against Chon, the Y.C.L. Corporation (d.b.a. The Gateway Hotel), Lopez-Nunez, Luna-Avila, Arzate, Garcia-Rico, Hsu and others. Charges in the indictment include conspiracy to commit alien smuggling, alien smuggling, alien smuggling resulting in death, money laundering and structuring financial transactions in order to avoid reporting requirements. The indictment also seeks a \$1 million monetary judgement against Chon as well as the criminal forfeiture to the Government of the Gateway Hotel.

The indictment alleges that beginning in June 2003, the defendants conspired and devised a plan to smuggle hundreds of undocumented aliens into the country from the Republic of Mexico and harbor them in El Paso using the Gateway Hotel and other locations. The defendants would allegedly harbor the aliens—supplying them with shelter, food and clothing—until their family or "sponsor" paid a fee, usually in the approximate amount of \$2,000. Once the fee was paid, generally by Western Union and/or Money Gram, the defendants would then transport the undocumented aliens to their final destination in the United States.

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The indictment specifically charges Luna-Avila with alien smuggling resulting in death of an undocumented alien on July 25, 2007. On that day, an undocumented alien attempting to return back to the Republic of Mexico drowned in the American canal in downtown El Paso. Upon conviction, Luna-Avila faces life imprisonment.

Each smuggling count carries up to ten years imprisonment; each money laundering count is punishable by imprisonment for up to 20 years; and, each structuring count carries up to 10 years imprisonment.

“These arrests are the culmination of an investigation of an El Paso business owner who for years was a key player of a network that smuggled and moved hundreds of illegal aliens into the country,” said Manuel Oyola-Torres, Special Agent in Charge of the ICE Office of Investigations in El Paso. “The success of this case is due largely to the relationship between ICE and its BEST partners, who share our goal of securing our borders and protecting the homeland.”

This investigation was conducted by agents with the Department of Homeland Security’s Immigration and Customs Enforcement Border Enforcement Security Task Force. El Paso BEST members are: ICE, U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s (CBP) Office of Border Patrol and Office of Field Operations; Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA); U.S. Department of State; Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF); Transportation Security Administration (TSA); El Paso County Sheriff’s Office; El Paso Police Department; and, Texas Department of Public Safety. Assistant United States Attorneys Juanita Fielden and David Rosado are prosecuting this case on behalf of the Government.

**An indictment is a formal accusation of criminal conduct, not evidence of guilt. The defendants are presumed innocent unless and until convicted through due process of law.**

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